

Olympic golds: Congress mints a controversy

By Roger Boye

A key Congressional aide has denounced the U.S. Mint's plans to produce new mint mark varieties of the Olympic gold coin.

Curtis A. Prins, staff director of the House Subcommittee on Consumer Affairs and Coinage, accused the mint of subverting the will of Congress by creating 13 varieties of the three basic Olympic coins authorized by law [two silver dollars and one gold coin]. The latest three varieties are proof gold coins bearing "P," "D" and "S" mint marks.

In an interview he requested with Numismatic News, Prins said the varieties are merely an attempt to milk even more money from hobbyists who have supported the Olympic program faithfully. Instead of adding mint mark varieties, mint officials should do a better job of selling the three basic coins to noncollectors, he asserted.

In 1982, lawmakers rejected as numismatic overkill a proposal to produce 17 Olympic coin designs. U.S. Rep. Frank Annunzio [D., Ill.], chairman of the House subcommittee, advocated the three-coin bill that eventually became law, saying it was a more reasonable approach.

But with the 13 mint-mark varieties of coins in both proof and uncirculated condition, a collector now would have to pay about \$2,000 to assemble a complete Olympic set. Prins, who works closely with Annunzio on coinage legislation, said the U.S. Mint's actions have damaged the committee's enthusiasm for supporting future commemorative coin programs.

● Slightly embarrassed bureaucrats will change the way they make dies for proof coins to ensure that all the coins carry an "S" mint mark.

Last year, several lucky collectors discovered that the dimes in their 1983 proof sets lacked a mint mark, boosting the value of those sets to at least \$600 each. In a similar error made in 1982, workers forgot to punch a "P" mint mark into just one die used to make dimes for circulation.

Starting next year, officials will include the mint mark on the "hub," an object used to make individual dies. Under present policy, workers punch the mint mark into each proof die by hand, a laborious process that leads to error.

● Joe Louis—the world's heavyweight boxing champion from 1937 to 1948—is depicted on the newest bronze medal being sold by Uncle Sam.

The 1½-inch collectible duplicates a Congressional gold medal presented to Louis' widow by President Reagan. The design features a portrait of Louis in boxing stance, the championship belt he won in 1937 and a pair of boxing gloves.

To order, send a check for \$2.25 per medal to the United States Mint [Medals], P.O. Box 500, Philadelphia, Pa. 19105.